

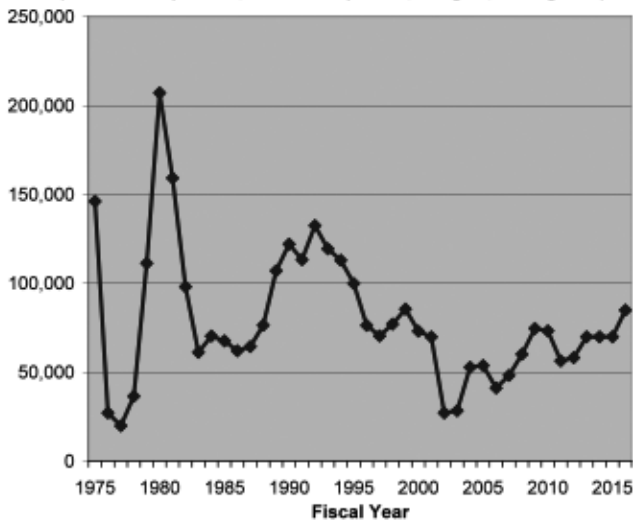
The Impact of Refugees on the Size and Security of the U.S. Population

EDWIN S. RUBENSTEIN

Since the end of World War II the United States has provided a safe haven for many oppressed peoples. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 — the first refugee legislation enacted by Congress — provided for the admission of 400,000 Europeans uprooted by the war. Later laws provided for the admission of persons fleeing communist regimes in Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Korea, China, and Cuba.

More than 3 million refugees have been admitted to the United States since 1975:

Fig. 1 Refugees Admitted to the U.S., 1975-2016
(Data: State Department, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration)



Edwin S. Rubenstein, a regular contributor to The Social Contract, is president of ESR Research, economic consultants. As a journalist, Mr. Rubenstein was a contributing editor at Forbes and economics editor at National Review, where his “Right Data” column was featured for more than a decade. He is the author of The Earned Income Tax Credit and Illegal Immigration: A Study in Fraud, Abuse, and Liberal Activism.

The ebb and flow of refugees over this period can be linked to foreign wars and terrorist events in this country. The big spike in the late seventies and early eighties reflects the admission of more than 350,000 Indochinese refugees following the communist takeover of Vietnam and Cambodia in 1975. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, followed shortly by the Balkan Wars, triggered another wave of refugees in the early 1990s; nearly half of all refugees admitted to the U.S. between 1989 and 1994 were from former communist bloc nations.

Admissions plummeted briefly after the September 2001 attacks, only to rebound in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq war. Over the past four decades refugee admissions have been as high as 207,000 in 1980, and as low as 27,000 in 2002.

In 2016 84,428 refugees were admitted, up from 69,933 in the prior fiscal year. The normal range for refugee admissions since 1975 has been between 60,000 and 90,000 per year.

Another type of refugee, the asylee, is an individual who is already in the U.S. but is unable or unwilling to return to his own country due to fear of persecution. In FY2014 (latest data available) 23,533 persons were granted asylum.¹ The top four countries of origin — China (PRC), Egypt, Syria, and Iraq — accounted for 52 percent of all asylees that year.

Based on the most recent data available, the combined inflow of refugees and asylees is currently running at about 110,000 per year.

Even at its peak, the refugee/asylee influx seems quite small compared to the number of legal immigrants entering the country. Legal immigration, as measured by the number of individuals granted Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status, averaged 875,000 per year over the 1975 to 2015 period. However, the impact of refugees on American population growth is far greater than their numbers alone would suggest:

For two years after their arrival refugees can petition to have immediate family members — spouses, children, parents — join them as legal immigrants.

Refugees themselves are required to apply

for legal permanent resident (LPR) status one year after their arrival.

Five years after becoming an LPR, refugees may apply for citizenship.

As a naturalized citizen, they can petition to have other family members — unmarried adult sons and daughters, married sons and daughters, brothers and sisters — enter as legal immigrants.

This chain migration process is replete with fraud. DNA testing reveals that as much as 90 percent of “family connection” claims in some refugee groups are false.² This explains why refugee groups from small, sparsely populated countries often trigger unexpectedly large inflows of legal and illegal immigrants.

The nexus between today’s refugees and tomorrow’s legal immigrants is rarely discussed, yet it has troubling implications for the size of the U.S. population. The Vietnam experience is particularly instructive. In recent years the number of Vietnamese refugees admitted to the U.S. has dwindled to less than 100; only 35 were admitted in 2015. Yet an average of 30,000 Vietnamese per year obtained LPR status in the years since 2003.

Similarly, after averaging 40,000 to 60,000 per year following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of communist bloc refugees fell steadily, to 8,700 in 2003. From 2004 to 2015 not a single refugee has been admitted from the former Soviet Union. Over this period, however, an average of roughly 30,000 individuals from Russia, Ukraine, and other components of the former Soviet Union have been granted LPR status each year.

Ditto Cuba, whose modest refugee totals — about 2,000 per year since 2010 — coincide with a legal permanent resident influx that currently averages about 35,000 per year.

The chain migration process by which one generation of refugees can spawn future generations of legal immigrants has been part of U.S. immigration policy since the 1965 Immigration Act. That law was supposed to cap legal immigration at about 200,000 per year, but the cap was waived for immigrants with relatives already in the U.S. Like compound interest, its impact unfolds over a long period of time, but may be imperceptible in the short run.

NATIONAL SECURITY TRUMPS HUMANITARIAN GOALS

In recent years national security has replaced humanitarian goals as the primary driver of U.S. refugee policy. Since 2011 the distribution of refugees has shifted markedly toward countries known to harbor terrorists.

Syria, Iraq, Somalia, and Iran were among the top

ten countries of origin for refugees entering the U.S. in 2016. They accounted for 43 percent of all refugees entering that year, up from 26 percent in 2011 — and there is good reason to expect that share will rise further. From 2011 to 2016, the total refugee arrivals rose by 46 percent. Over the same period the number of Iranian refugees admitted to the U.S. rose by 85 percent, the Somali refugee influx nearly tripled, and the Syrian refugee inflow rose from 29 to 12,587, up a staggering 433,034 percent.

Undeterred by the Paris and San Bernardino attacks — not to mention proclamations by 32 governors declaring Syrian refugees would not be allowed to settle in their states — in January 2016 President Obama announced plans to accept an additional 10,000 Syrian refugees. As seen below, he exceeded the “goal” by about 2,500 in FY2016.

**Table 1. Ten Largest Refugee Sending Countries
Fiscal Years 2016 and 2011
(Ranked by refugees admitted in 2016)**

	2016		2011	
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Dem. Republic of Congo	16,370	19.9%	977	1.7%
Syria	12,587	15.3%	29	0.1%
Burma	12,347	15.0%	16,972	30.1%
Iraq	9,880	12.0%	9,388	16.6%
Somalia	9,020	10.9%	3,161	5.6%
Bhutan	5,817	7.1%	14,999	26.6%
Iran	3,750	4.5%	2,032	3.6%
Afghanistan	2,737	3.3%	428	0.8%
Ukraine	2,543	3.1%	426	0.8%
Eritrea	1,949	2.4%	2,032	3.6%
Other countries	5,428	6.6%	5,980	10.6%
Total	82,428	100.0%	56,424	100.0%

**Data: State Department, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center.
<http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/statistics/index.htm#>**

Refugee activists point out that Obama’s commitment is a trickle compared to Angela Merkel’s acceptance of nearly 93,000 Syrians in 2015. Lost in the humanitarian rhetoric: Germany had no choice. The European Union’s generous asylum policies make it easy for migrants to declare themselves refugees after entering illegally. Once admitted to any EU country, the new “refugees” have legal access to all EU countries. Germany’s strong economy makes it a preferred destination.

The Syrian civil war could surpass Vietnam and Iraq in its ability to bring refugees to this country. Nearly 5 million Syrians have been displaced and are living as refugees in nearby countries. In addition, the State Department has declared that more than two-thirds of Syria’s pre-war population — 17 million people — are in need of humanitarian assistance.³

Meanwhile, ISIS has established subsidiaries beyond its traditional middle-east venues. The execu-

tive order signed by President Trump on January 27, 2017, suspended entry of all refugees from seven “failed states” deemed likely to harbor terrorists. His need to act is obvious: those states had collectively dominated the U.S. refugee influx in 2016 — Barak Obama’s last full year in office:

Table 2. Refugees from the Trump Seven, 2015-2016 (Fiscal years)

	2016	2015	% change
Syria	12,587	1,682	648.3%
Iraq	9,880	12,676	-22.1%
Somalia	9,020	8,858	1.8%
Iran	3,750	3,109	20.6%
Sudan	1,458	1,578	-7.6%
Yemen	26	16	62.5%
Libya	1	0	NA
Trump 7	36,722	27,919	31.5%
Other countries	45,706	42,014	8.8%
Total	82,428	69,933	17.9%

Data source: State Department, Office of Refugee Admission, Refugee Processing Center, as of 12/31/2016.

The number of refugees admitted from the seven countries cited in Trump’s executive order increased by 32 percent in 2016. By contrast, the refugee inflow from all other countries rose by only 9 percent. About 70 percent of refugees admitted in 2016 were from the Trump seven. The executive order will restore sanity to what had become a reckless policy.

NO MATTER HOW EXTREME, VETTING IS NOT ENOUGH

For years Obama administration officials assured us that refugees “are subject to more intensive security than any other traveler to protect us against threats to out national security.”⁴ There is no reason to doubt this. The problem in screening refugees from Syria, and other failed states such as Somalia, Libya, Yemen, or Afghanistan — is not a lack of resources or commitment.

The problem is it can’t be done.

Our vetting is heavily dependent on electronic checks of databases with biographical information, photos, and fingerprints.⁵ But little of the type of information that could potentially raise “red flags” is available in this format. Birth certificates, death records, driver’s licenses, school records, credit card statements, police records, and all the other electronic footprints we take for granted, are rare or non-existent in the undeveloped world — even in the best of times.

In fact, it has been reported that most Syrian refugees present hard copies of documents from that country. Many are legitimate. As veteran immigration agent Dan Cadman explains, “This is because many Syrian government offices have been overrun in the chaos of war, leaving their trove of blank documents — passports, national identity cards, driver’s licenses, etc. — behind

for extremist groups and criminal gangs to take advantage of.”⁶ ICE’s Forensic Document Laboratory (FDL) has genuine blanks of every country’s documents, but that doesn’t help when false identities are inserted into legitimate forms.

Amazingly, presenting a bogus document does not disqualify a refugee from being admitted. The rationale for overlooking fraudulent documents is embedded in international law. It dates from World War II, when Raoul Wallenberg saved many Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe by putting their names on Swedish passports.

In theory, counterfeit documents would be discovered by immigration officers who have access to the FDL. In practice, their workload is too crushing to scan every document. Only if an immigration officer suspects something is amiss would FDL get involved. Should a document prove fraudulent, immigration officials must discern whether the individual is a legitimate refugee using a false document out of desperation or a terrorist. Cadman warns that “Given ground realities, that is a near-impossibility, and failing the ability to establish legal disqualifiers to entry, the decision will inevitably be to grant status and admit. That is what refugee officers do.”⁷

It seems likely that the Syrian refugee experience will play out much like that of another failed state: Somalia. Somali refugees have changed the demographics of small towns like Lewiston, Maine, and Shelbyville, Tennessee, and entire neighborhoods in cities like Columbus, Ohio, Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

The epicenter of Somali refugee resettlement in the U.S. is Minneapolis-St. Paul. Since the 1990s the State Department has relocated more than 30,000 Somali refugees to Minnesota, where they can take advantage of some of the country’s most generous welfare and private charity programs. Most of the refugees settled near the Twin Cities, with Minneapolis now dubbed “Little Mogadishu.”

The unintended consequences of this resettlement: an enclave of immigrants, most of whom are unemployed, that is both stressing the state’s budget and creating a rich pool of potential recruits for Islamist terror groups. The FBI has noticed a steady stream of Islamist videos specifically targeting Minnesota’s Somali population.⁸

The propaganda seems to work. Since 2008 as many as 40 men from Minneapolis are reported by federal officials to have joined Islamist groups after being solicited through social media. FBI has investigated Somali men suspected of leaving their homes in Minnesota to become fighters for ISIS in Syria and Al-Shabab in Somalia.

In the summer of 2015 a Somali graduate of a Minnesota high school died fighting for ISIS in Syria.⁹

Most of these people may have entered, as refugees, with no terrorist background. Some may have even

been U.S. citizens, born here to Somali refugees. The refugee experience, with its many frustrations, made them vulnerable to jihadist propaganda. No amount of vetting can predict who among the many those few will be.

National security is not a major concern with refugees from Burma, the Congo, and Bhutan. Indeed, these countries are far from the minds of most Americans, and yet they account for 46 percent of all refugees admitted in FY2015. Why? The answer lies in legislation that made refugees a permanent component of U.S. immigration policy.

THE REFUGEE ACT OF 1980: EXPANDING THE “REFUGEE” DEFINITION

Originally the criteria for admitting refugees were set in this country and were aligned with U.S. foreign policy goals. Refugees brought here received assistance as needed — mainly from private charities. Financial self-sufficiency within a short period of arrival was universally expected.

Congress’s frustration with the apparent inability of private resettlement agencies to cope with the post-Vietnam refugee surge set in motion legislation that, at the end of the day, greatly exacerbated the problem. The Refugee Act of 1980 effectively terminated our control over the origin and purpose of refugees coming into the country.

Traditionally, a refugee was someone fleeing government persecution, often in fear for his or her life. The 1980 Act redefined refugee to conform with the United Nations Protocol relating to the status of refugees, namely:

a person who is unwilling or unable to return to his country of nationality or habitual residence because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.¹⁰

The new law broadened the meaning of “persecution” to include various types of social discrimination, not necessarily government sanctioned. Such behavior may be abhorrent, but it is usually not life threatening and rarely the result of systematic political oppression. In addition, the law extended refugee status to every member of any class of people believed to face discrimination. Thus individual members of persecuted groups are not required to provide any evidence of persecution to be deemed a refugee.

Not surprisingly, a robust fraudulent documentation industry attesting to membership in persecuted groups has arisen. Documents attesting to a family relationship with a refugee already in the United States are now easily procured in what has become an international Black Market.

The President is still nominally in charge of the U.S. refugee program. He, in consultation with Congress, sets an annual cap for refugee admissions. However the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the agency that determines exactly who meets the refugee definition and, therefore, where most of our refugees come from.

In recent years up to 95 percent of the refugees coming into the U.S. were referred by the UNHCR or were relatives of U.N.-selected refugees.

A permanent U.S. Refugee Admission Program, with its own acronym — USRAP — is the burdensome legacy of the 1980 Act. The evolution of USRAP is summarized in the Obama’s Administration’s refugee admissions report to Congress for FY2012:

...In the early years of the program, large numbers of relatively few nationalities located in a limited number of countries dominated the program. Many of the resettled refugees had family members already in the United States. Over the past decade, however, the United States has worked closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to make third country resettlement a viable, durable solution for increasing numbers from a broader representation of the world’s refugee population, which currently stands at 15.1 million. While we have again resettled large numbers of Burmese, Bhutanese, and Iraqis this year, the USRAP has admitted refugees from over 70 nationalities who were processed in some 100 countries...¹¹

Lost in the bureaucratic maze: the wishes of the refugees themselves. Many are not overly enthusiastic about coming to these shores. A survey of Burmese ethnic minorities in Thailand found that only 37 percent actually wanted to come to the United States.¹² No matter. The refugee industry selected this group for resettlement. And they are coming here.

Also lost: the United Nations’ refugee bureaucracy. Despite classifying as many as 20 million individuals as refugees, the UNHCR does not advocate large-scale refugee resettlement because its drawbacks far outweigh its benefits.¹³ UN officials know that even if rich countries were generous to the point of putting their national and economic security at risk, they could never admit more than a fraction of the refugee population. So humanitarian efforts should be concentrated where they can help the most people: in the camps near the home country and in clearing barriers for refugees to go home.

The Center for Immigration Studies estimates that it costs 12 times more to resettle a Syrian refugee in the U.S. as it does to care for the same refugee in neighbor-

ing Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon. (The five-year cost of resettling one Middle-Eastern refugee here is conservatively estimated at \$64,000, while U.N. figures indicate \$5,300 is needed to provide for the same person in his native region.) True humanitarians, people desirous of helping the most people in need, should push for resettling fewer refugees here and more abroad. Yet arrivals to the U.S. still increase.

Why?

Once again, the 1980 Refugee Act is the major reason.

THE 1980 REFUGEE LAW: FEDERAL FUNDING SPAWNS A PRIVATE REFUGEE INDUSTRY

The 1980 Act authorized federal funding for the resettlement of refugees. These tax dollars have created new federal, state, and non-governmental organization (NGO) bureaucracies dedicated to administering and funding U.S. refugee programs. This arrangement, often referred to as a public-private partnership, has influenced refugee policy more than any other aspect of the law.

An expensive refugee assistance industry, focused more on protecting and expanding its share of public funding than helping refugees or the communities in which they settle, is the predictable, albeit unintended, consequence of the 1980 Act.

Two federal agencies sustain the refugee industry:

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), in the State Department, supports a major share of UNHCR's budget. In FY2014 this support came to *\$1.28 billion*, making the U.S. by far the largest donor to the UNHCR.¹⁴ Some of this money is supposedly used to expand the capacity of countries outside the U.S. to absorb refugees — potentially reducing the share of refugees coming to the U.S. Despite this, more refugees come to the U.S. than to the rest of the world combined: Sixty-seven percent of UNHCR-referred refugees settled in the U.S. in 2014.¹⁵

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), enrolls refugees in a broad range of welfare programs for which refugees automatically qualify after 30 days. ORR spent about *\$609 million* in FY2015. Nearly half of this goes to states and voluntary resettlement agencies to help defray cash, medical assistance, and employment-related assistance for newly arrived refugees. The balance funds formula grants to states and NGOs for English language and employment-related training and the Unaccompanied Alien Children Program.¹⁶

A refugee resettlement industry, dependent on federal contracts, is the result. Groups like Human Rights First, World Relief, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

(HIAS), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), and Episcopal Migration Ministries have strong presences in Washington. Collaborating with the State Department and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, they push to have more refugees placed in America, bringing more federal monies flowing into their coffers.

Known collectively as “voluntary agencies” or “volags,” most of these organizations are religiously affiliated. They, in turn, contract out resettlement work to hundreds of affiliates, most of them run by former refugees themselves.¹⁷ The affiliates focus mainly on keeping refugees in touch with individuals of the same ethnicity and culture — both here and in their homeland. In other words, volags support groups that may slow, or even reverse, the ability of refugees to assimilate in the U.S.

Prior to 1980 volags bore the full costs of refugee resettlement. In 1980 they became eligible for a State Department Reception and Placement Grant (RPG) to help defray the costs of resettling refugees in the first few months after their arrival.¹⁸

From 1980 to 2000 the RPG was \$900 per refugee. In 2010 the grant was doubled to \$1,800. Today it is \$1,875 per refugee. About \$1,100 of this pays for services directly received by the refugee; the volags divert the remaining \$775 to staff salaries, office space, and overhead expenses related to resettlement.

If the RPG amount seems small compared to the costs of resettling a refugee, it is because “resettling” does not mean what you think it does. Volags do little more than sign the refugees up for public housing, welfare, and other social services provided by local communities in which they are placed. After one month their responsibility is over — and they move on to the next revenue-generating refugee.

A higher RPG amount means more dollars available for advocacy and lobbying expenses incurred by volags in their quest for refugee resettlement contracts.

Still the volags cry poverty. This from *The Real Cost of Welcome*, a financial analysis published by the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service:

The public-private partnership is heavily skewed in favor of the private contribution. On average, the federal contribution is a mere 39 percent of the total resources needed to meet cooperative agreement guidelines.

LIRS affiliates supplement PRM funding by contributing an average of \$3,228 in goods and services for each case.¹⁹

Dig into the cost calculations, however, and you find that 30 percent of what LIRS counts as resources it devotes to refugee resettlement consists of “Volunteer

Hours and in-Kind Donations.” In effect, LIRS wants the federal government to pay for the time and material that its supporters voluntarily give to the organization.

Do LIRS donors want this? Probably not. Most give because they think it is the right thing to do. Many of them believe government should stay out of the refugee business entirely. But for LIRS, more government money means more dollars available for political advocacy, lobbying, and ultimately, more federal contracts for refugee resettlement.

You think volags are charities? Think again. David Robinson, the Director of the State Department’s Refugee Bureau, writes this about the refugee component of Catholic Charities:

The federal government provides about 90 percent of its collective budget,” and its lobbying umbrella “wields enormous influence over the administration’s refugee admissions policy. It lobbies the Hill effectively to increase the number of refugees admitted for permanent resettlement each year.... If there is a conflict of interest, it is never mentioned...The solution its members offer to every refugee crisis is simplistic and the same: Increase the number of admissions to the United States without regard to budgets.²⁰

Fifty-eight percent of Catholic Charities’ budget goes to salaries, including \$150,000 to its director.²¹

Once a refugee program gets started, it is nearly impossible to stop. The Vietnamese resettlement program was finally closed in the late 1990s, more than twenty years after the War’s end. But in 2006, despite the normalization of diplomatic relations with Vietnam (which presumably means the Vietnamese were not persecuting anyone), it was officially re-opened at the behest of refugee advocacy groups. Nearly 100,000 Vietnamese applied for refugee status when the latest refugee program was announced.²²

One of the largest resettlement agencies, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), was created at the turn of the twentieth century to help Russian Jews escape persecution. The organization thrived through its first half century, and experienced a revival in the 1980s and 1990s when hundreds of thousands of Jews fled the former Soviet Union.

There are no Jewish refugees today. Virtually every Jew has freedom of movement, and the vast majority live in democratic societies. Instead of declaring “mission accomplished,” HIAS simply adopted a different mission. Today it is one of the largest contractors for Sudanese, Kenyan, and Ugandan refugees. In 2014 the head of advocacy and policy at HIAS called for the U.S. to accept 75,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years. At 15,000 per year, Syria would rival Iraq as the

largest source of refugees since September 11, 2001.²³

While the influx of Syrian refugees will create fiscal and security problems for many U.S. communities, it will increase donations and save staff jobs at HIAS and other refugee industry operatives. For them, doing well has replaced doing good.

ABANDONED UPON ARRIVAL

Economic integration and self-sufficiency are the professed goals of the refugee industry. Behind the PR is a brutal truth: refugee NGOs routinely abandon their charges before they find work, moving on to the next, more profitable, cycle of fresh refugee admissions.

The volags’ responsibility ends a few months after a refugee’s arrival. After that they expect the welfare system to take over — and they are not disappointed. Unlike most legal immigrants, newly arrived refugees are eligible for the full gamut of federal safety net benefits. They are treated as if they were native-born citizens.

Government surveys find that refugees are three to five times more likely than native-born Americans to receive cash welfare, Medicaid, and food stamps, and to live in public housing:

Program	Refugees	Natives
Cash assistance	46.9%	6.1%
Medicaid	59.5%	20.3%
Food stamps	75.9%	15.9%
Public housing	20.5%	4.6%

Data sources: Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2014 Survey (refugees.); CIS, Immigrants in the United States, October 2016, Table 12, page 25. (natives.)

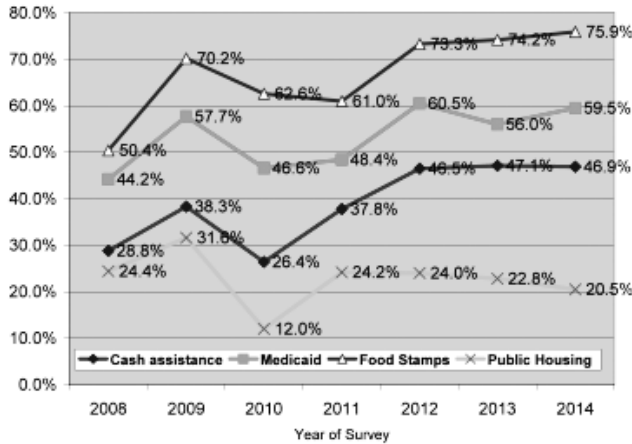
More importantly, recent refugee arrivals appear more dependent on many types of public assistance than earlier refugee cohorts. A steady rise in dependency is evident in survey data presented in the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s latest report to Congress (see first column page 33).

Forty-seven percent of refugee households surveyed in 2014 received some kind of cash assistance. While down slightly from the prior year’s survey, it is significantly above the 38.3 percent cash dependency rate recorded in the 2009 survey, at the depth of the Great Recession. Similarly, a whopping 76 percent of refugees surveyed in 2014 were on food stamps — a rate that also exceeds dependency recorded at the worst point of the Great Recession.

Dependency on Medicaid (federal medical insurance for low-income households) also continues at or near rates experienced during the Great Recession. From 2008 to 2014 the share of refugees receiving Medicaid increased from 44.2 percent to 59.5 percent,

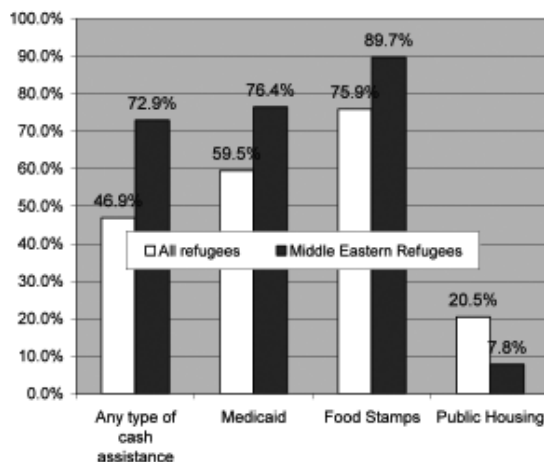
albeit with drops in 2010 and 2013. Only 9.5 percent of refugee families obtained medical insurance through an employer in 2014. Among Middle Eastern refugees, only 4.3 percent were covered through their employer.²⁴

Fig. 2 Refugee Dependency Rates for Selected Welfare Programs, 2008-2014
(Data: Office of Refugee Resettlement, Report to Congress, FY2014)



Housing assistance is one area where refugee dependency has remained stable in recent years. At 20.6 percent in 2014, refugee usage of public housing is below its 2009 peak (31.6 percent), but considerably above the low of 12 percent recorded in the 2010 survey. Housing is also the only benefit program that Middle-Eastern refugees utilize at lower rates than other refugees:

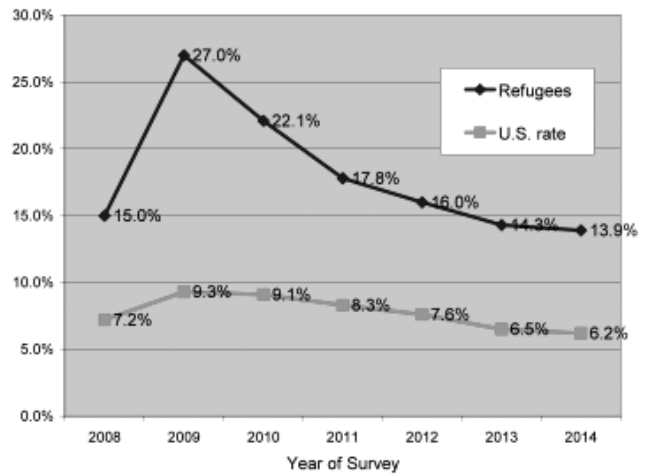
Fig. 3 Welfare Usage Rates: Middle-Eastern v. All Refugees
(Data: Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2014 Survey)



ORR defines “Middle East” as comprising Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. Refugees from four of those nations — Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen — are banned from entering under President Trump’s executive order. If he succeeds in having this order re-instated, welfare usage by refugees admitted to the country will fall, and U.S. taxpayers will pay less to provide benefits to newly admitted refugees.

Unemployment is still the best predictor of welfare dependency. The trend here seems good: while refugees continue to be unemployed at greater rates than the average American, the gap has narrowed considerably:

Fig. 4 Unemployment Rates: Refugees v. U.S., 2008-2014
(Data: Office of Refugee Resettlement, Report to Congress, FY2014)



Refugee unemployment has been cut nearly in half since 2009, when a catastrophic 27 percent were unemployed. What had been a three-fold multiple relative to the U.S. rate is, in the latest survey, slightly more than a two-fold plus multiple — still too high, but better than it was.

Once again, the regional differences are stark and do not bode well for continued improvement. The latest refugee survey (2014) found unemployment rates for African and Middle Eastern refugees to be 20.0 percent and 25.4 percent, respectively, well above the 13.9 percent average for all refugees. At the other extreme, the unemployment rate for refugees from Latin America and South/Southeast Asia was 7.5 percent and 6.3 percent, respectively.

Unemployment rates measure the percent of a group’s labor force that is not working. If a person stops looking for work — say he feels the chance of finding a job are too slim or no longer wants to work — he is no longer considered to be in the labor force, and therefore, is no longer counted as unemployed. This can have the ironic effect of lowering a group’s unemployment rate even when fewer members of the group are actually working.

For this reason a refugee group’s Labor Force Participation rate (LPR), which measures the percentage of working age adults who are either working or looking for work, is a better measure of a group’s work ethic than its unemployment rate. Here again, regional differences are significant. Middle Eastern refugees had the lowest LPR of all refugee groups surveyed in 2014 — 49.7 percent. At the other extreme, Latin American refugees had the highest LPR — a whopping 80.6 percent — while the average for all refugees was 56.3 percent.

Cultural attitudes toward women and work play an important role in these disparities. Female refugees from the Middle East are far less likely to participate in the labor force than men from that region: in 2014 their LPR was 34.8 percent versus 65.1 percent for males. Refugees from no other region have such a wide male/female LPR gap. Even worse: male refugees from the Middle East are less likely to work, or look for work, than males from other regions.²⁵

The unemployment problems of recent refugees cannot be attributed to a lack of resources devoted to training, counseling, or placing them in gainful employment. More than anything it reflects a deterioration in the innate employability of new refugees. Relative to earlier cohorts, today's refugees are more likely to have spent time in refugee camps, have experienced trauma, be disabled, and come from cultures where females are discouraged from entering the workforce.

The ability to speak English is a leading indicator of employability, not to mention assimilation into American culture. The news here is not good: Forty-five percent of refugees who arrived in 2014 spoke no English at all, and an additional 28.3 percent spoke English "Not Well." Only 26.5 percent spoke English "Well/Very Well."²⁶

These problems are not easily rectified by federal contractors committing to a few months with each refugee. Forty years after the Vietnam War, Vietnamese-Americans are still unassimilated, most living in separate communities, while about half of them still have limited proficiency in English.²⁷

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BURDEN

Over the past few decades resettlement has shifted away from traditional immigrant gateways such as Los Angeles and New York to smaller cities where the cost of living is lower. In many cases the refugee influx was fast and unexpected. Small, relatively homogeneous communities were forced to absorb individuals who often do not speak English, are uneducated, and lack marketable skills.

The federal programs designed to help places cope with this situation are short term in nature. They do not extend beyond an initial reception period. At that point, state and local governments must use whatever scarce resources they have to support refugees.

State and local dissatisfaction with Washington dumping of refugees has generated resistance across the country, from Idaho to South Carolina and places in between. Three states have tried to stop refugee resettlement within their borders:

- Tennessee passed the Refugee Absorptive Capacity Act in May 2011. The law tried to force the State Department to enforce the two provisions of the 1980 Refugee Act, one requiring that state and local gov-

ernments be notified when a large number of refugees are coming, the second allowing a local government to request a "moratorium" on new refugees by documenting that it lacks the capacity to meet the needs of its current population.

- New Hampshire passed legislation similar to the Tennessee law in 2012.²⁸ The Mayor of Manchester championed the legislation. Over the past 10 years 2,100 mostly Somali, Sudanese, Bhutanese, and Iraqi refugees have settled in his city, home to around 110,000 people.

- Georgia Governor Nathan Deal withheld contracts for federal funding earmarked for English language instruction, job training, and afterschool programs for refugees in 2010. From 2009 to 2011 9,131 refugees were settled in Georgia, one-third from Bhutan and one-third from Burma. In late 2011 a network of refugee NGOs persuaded the Governor to release the funds.

Such pushback is not surprising. Refugees are a drain on state and local resources, particularly public schools, social service agencies, and emergency rooms. They burden local infrastructure — roads, public housing, and mass transit. To be sure, refugees are good for the businesses that sell to them, and for local landlords that rent to them. But for ordinary workers — the bottom 99 percent — they represent a competing labor force that lowers wages and increases taxes.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

There are an estimated 20 million refugees in the world. If the U.S. (and every other "rich" country) were to double, triple, or (fill in the multiple) spending on refugee resettlement, only a fraction of the global refugee population could be absorbed. Refugees are better served by upgrading refugee camps and removing barriers to their repatriation than allowing a lucky few to settle in a place like the United States.

As brought out above, the line between humanitarian aid and self-serving financial gain on the part of employees of refugee agencies is often blurred. Non-profits that lobby for ever more refugee admissions often have hidden agendas. And shortly after arriving, refugees are, in effect, abandoned by their sponsoring agency, forcing many to assimilate into American culture before they are able to. This creates a sense of alienation from their host country that makes them vulnerable to terrorist propaganda.

More importantly, we cannot ignore the burden on native-born Americans — including U.S.-born children of refugees — citizens who will face more competition for jobs, higher taxes, overcrowded schools, and environmental degradation that inevitably accompany a larger refugee population. Bringing refugees to the United States has become a "feel-good activity" — but one that ends up harming more people than it helps. ■

Endnotes

1. Department of Homeland Security, *2014 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, Table 16.
2. Don Barnett, *Refugee Resettlement: A System Badly in Need of Review*, Center for Immigration Studies, May 2011. <http://www.cis.org/sites/cis.org/files/articles/2011/refugee-system-needs-review.pdf>
3. State Department Fact Sheet, February 4, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/252113.htm>
4. Nayla Rush, *Hearing on Refugees: Reassurance and Storytelling*, Center for Immigration Studies, October 2015.
5. Mark Krikorian, *The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program*, Testimony to Congress, November 19, 2015.
6. Dan Cadman, *Why Syrian Refugee Vetting Will Be Indisputably Fallible*, Center for Immigration Studies, October 16, 2015.
7. Cadman, *op.cit.*
8. Kelly Riddell, *Feds' relocation of Somali refugees stresses Minn. welfare, raises terror fears*, Washington Times, February 24, 2015.
9. Krikorian, *op. cit.*
10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_relating_to_the_Status_of_Refugees#Definition_of_a_refugee
11. U.S. State Department, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2012*, Report to the Congress. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/181378.pdf>
12. Thomas Allen, *Why More Vietnamese Refugees – Thirty Years After the War? Because There's Money in it, Stupid*, V Dare, July 3, 2007.
13. Roy Beck, *The Case Against Immigration*, W.W. Norton and Co., 1996, page 71.
14. U.S. State Department, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2016*, page 3.
15. *Ibid.*, page 3.
16. Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Report to Congress FY2009*, US DHHS. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/fy_2009_annual_report_to_congress.pdf
17. Don Barnett, *Refugee Resettlement: A System Badly in Need of Review*, The Social Contract, Summer 2013.
18. James R. Edwards, Jr., *Religious Agencies and Refugee Resettlement*, Center for Immigration Studies, March 2012. <http://www.cis.org/articles/2012/edwards-religious-refugee-resettlement.pdf>
19. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, *The Real Cost of Welcome: A Financial Analysis of Local Refugee Reception*. <http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/RPTREALCOSTWELCOME.pdf>
20. Don Barnett, *Official line on refugee costs doesn't hold up*, The Social Contract, Spring 2012. <http://www.thesocialcontract.com/pdf/twentytwo-three/tsc-22-3-barnett.pdf>
21. *Ibid.*
22. Thomas Allen, *op.cit.*
23. Leo Hohmann, *U.N. to dump flood of Muslim refugees on U.S.*, World Net Daily, September 15, 2014.
24. Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Annual Report to Congress FY2014*, Table II-18, page 103.
25. Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Annual Report to Congress FY2014*, Table II-11, page 92.
26. Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Annual Report to Congress FY2014*, Table II-14, page 96.
27. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/the-economics-of-syrian-refugees>
28. <http://nhpr.org/post/nh-house-passes-refugee-moratorium-bill>